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Ministry of Education

EDUCATION AGREEMENT TO HELP COASTAL ABORIGINAL STUDENTS

BELLA COOLA – Education Minister Shirley Bond, Aboriginal leaders and officials of the Central Coast board of education announced the signing of B.C.'s 39th Aboriginal education enhancement agreement to help improve Aboriginal student achievement.

"The Central Coast school district has worked hard to provide this framework for improving achievement levels for its Aboriginal students," said Bond. "Today's agreement on the eve of National Aboriginal Day will launch a partnership between the Heiltsuk, Nuxalk, Oweekeno, Metis and other communities and the school district, and all partners deserve congratulations for this historic agreement."

Local Aboriginal communities, the Ministry of Education and the school district worked closely to develop strategies to help improve student achievement, which include:

- Increasing the number of Aboriginal students who successfully complete a Dogwood Certificate and enabling them to develop their individual potential and eligibility to enrol in a meaningful career, technical, or academic post-secondary program.
- Increasing the knowledge and appreciation of Aboriginal culture, history, and language for all students throughout the school district.
- Increasing success for all Aboriginal students in reading and writing.

"We recognize that the signing of this Aboriginal education enhancement agreement will ensure the success of our First Nations students," said Robyn Willis, chair of the Central Coast board of education. "This document recognizes the importance of Aboriginal culture and will provide the First Nations students of the Central Coast the confidence that their future educational needs will be met."

There are 184 Aboriginal students in the Central Coast school district this year, 67 per cent of the total number of students in the district. The district serves the Heiltsuk First Nation, the Nuxalk, and Oweekeno First Nations, in addition to Metis, Inuit and off-reserve Aboriginal students.

"One of the focus areas for this Aboriginal education enhancement agreement is on increasing the knowledge of and respect for Aboriginal culture, language and history. We believe that every student will benefit from having a better understanding about Aboriginal people," said Marshall Hans, representative of the Enhancement Committee. "This agreement will also help us concentrate on encouraging continuous improvement in the academic performance of all Aboriginal students."

Thirty-nine B.C. school districts have signed Aboriginal education enhancement agreements to date. These agreements support the Province's Pacific Leadership Agenda to build new relationships with First Nations, and to improve education and economic opportunities.

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For example, the Fort Nelson school district, which signed an agreement in February 2006, saw its Aboriginal completion rate rise to 73 per cent in 2006/07, from 57 per cent in 2004/05.

The agreements are one component of the Province's strategy to improve Aboriginal student achievement. Others include the new First Nations education jurisdiction agreement and developing Aboriginal content for K-12 curriculum.

The Province is investing an estimated $51.1 million a year – $1,014 per student – for Aboriginal education in 2007-08. The funds are used to support Aboriginal language and culture programs, Aboriginal support service programs, and other localized Aboriginal education programs.

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